



European Foundation  
for the Improvement  
of Living and Working  
Conditions

The tripartite EU Agency providing  
knowledge to assist in the development  
of social and work-related policies

# Social and economic mobility: are destinies diverging?

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# Why does social mobility matter?

**Economic** – loss of human capital/skills, growth, inequalities

**Social** – erosion and divergence of solidarity support for public institutions, cohesion

**Political** – democracies work based on the consent of the governed, trust in institutions

**Moral** – social justice/fairness

**Importance of perceptions** (of lack of opportunities, lack of fairness)



# Social mobility engrained in American and European setting

**The American Dream** - *Barack knows the American Dream because he's lived it, and he wants everyone in this country to have that same opportunity, no matter who we are or where we're from or what we look like or who we love* - Michelle Obama

**Social foundations** - *'agreed upon the necessity to promote improvement of living and working conditions of labour so as to permit equalization of such conditions in an upward direction'* Treaty of Rome 1957

# Absolute or Relative social mobility?

**Absolute:** Each generation in relation to generation before (% better off than parents at same age, overall rising of living standards)

**Relative:** (chances of moving up or down) - Individual rank compared the rank of that individuals' parents at same age

**Important difference also for policymaking**

# Absolute mobility



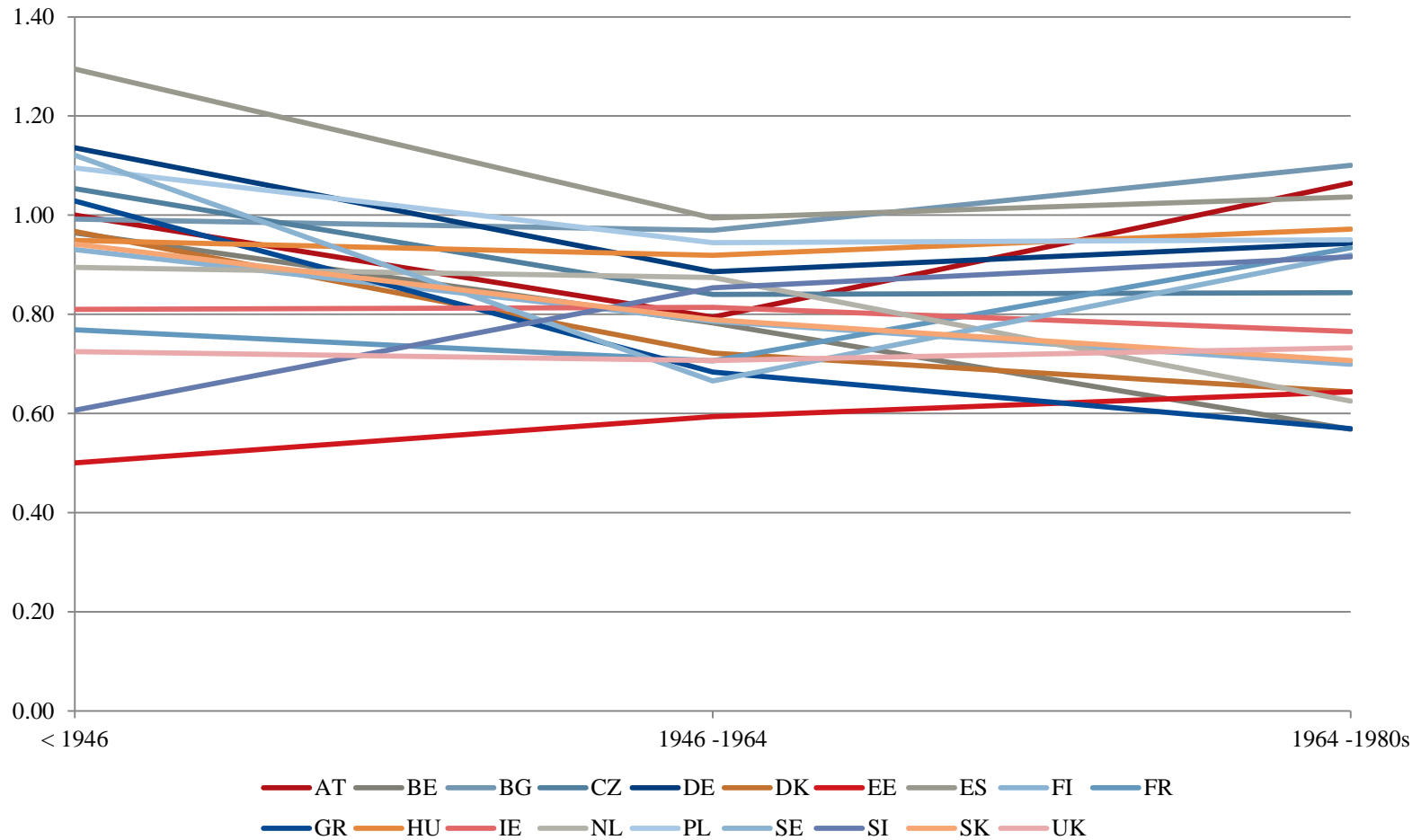
*John F. Kennedy*

- Society experienced large shifts in its structure between generations, the **extent of upward mobility increased and prevailed over downward mobility.**
- As the society structure changed (or modernised due to the disappearance of low-skilled menial jobs and growth in service-class and highly qualified jobs), **the more the extent of absolute social mobility among men and women became similar.**

# Importance of relative mobility - convergence

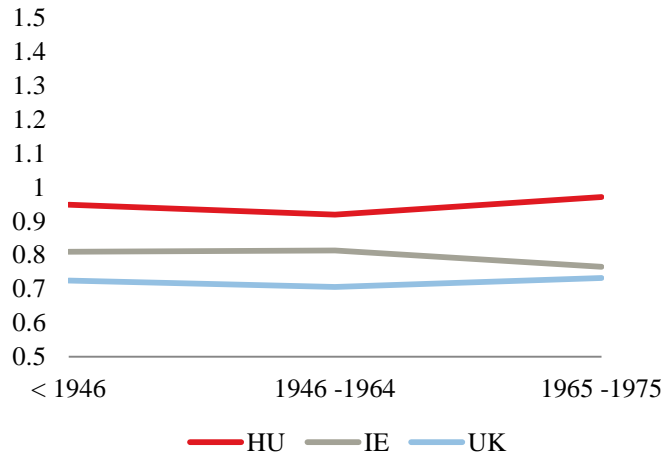
- ...calls for restoring the European “**convergence machine**” thought completing the Economic and Monetary Union and developing a social dimension of the European Union.  
European Union White Paper 2017
- “A Social Europe: a Union which, based on sustainable growth, promotes **economic and social progress** as well as cohesion and **convergence**”.  
*Rome Declaration, March 25h, 2017*
- *EC Reflection Paper on Social dimension of Europe – 2017 - stating that ‘In a modern and cohesive society, everyone should be able to contribute fully and have access to new ‘ladders of opportunities at different stages of their life’*

# Relative social mobility – Has convergence happened?

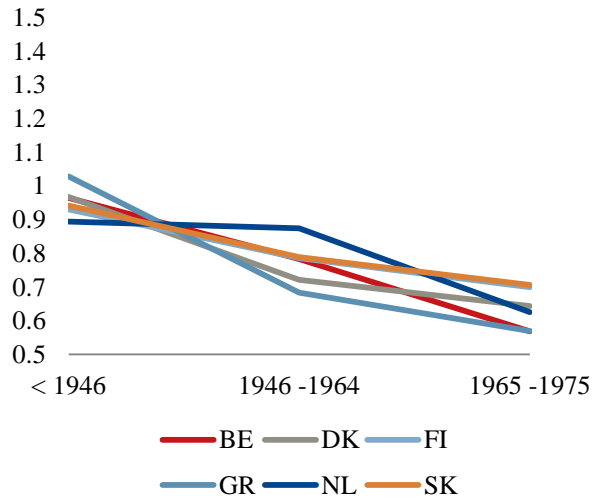


# Country patterns

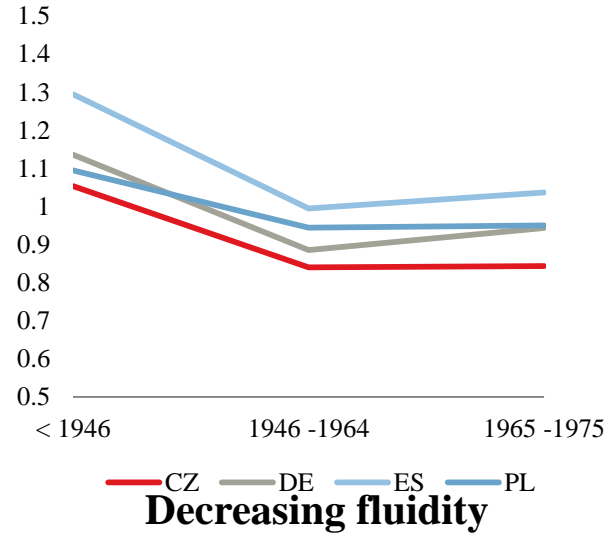
## Invariable fluidity



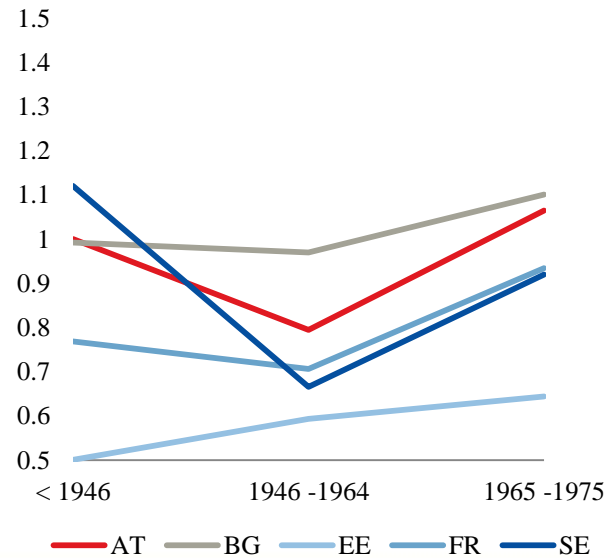
## Increasing fluidity



## Stabilizing fluidity

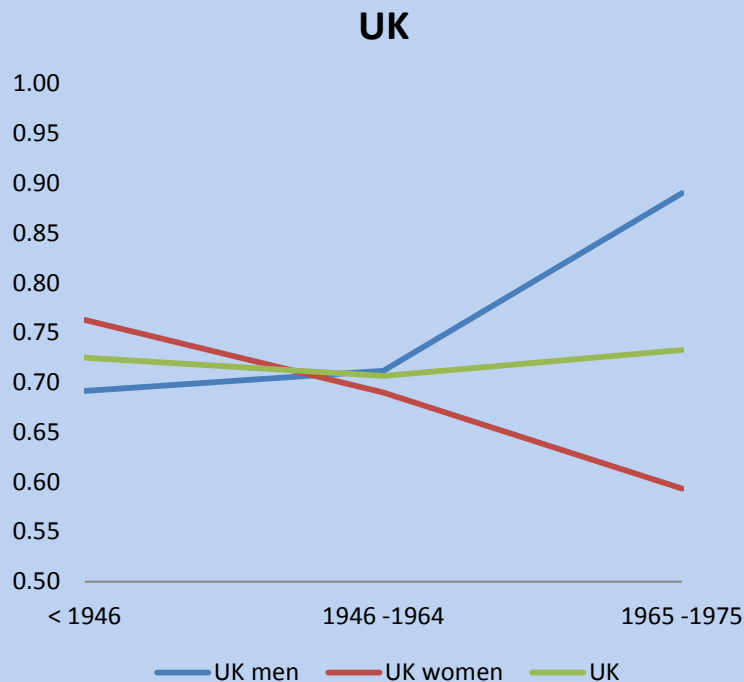


## Decreasing fluidity





# Gender matters

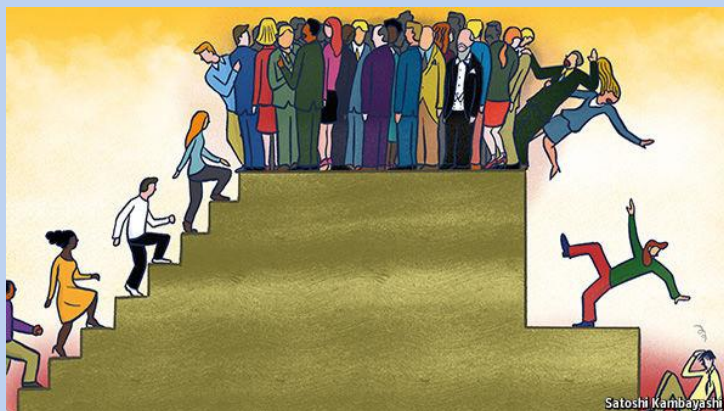


- Men from Generation X experience decrease in social mobility – **UK, France, Sweden, Austria, Estonia and Bulgaria.**
- Increased in Germany, Spain but also in countries with higher levels of social mobility

# Drivers of policy discourse – factors

1. **Term (social mobility)** rarely mentioned however widespread concern about the impact of inequalities on future generation voiced in most countries
2. **Fairness** – security of pensions (IT), future of youth (GR, BG)
3. **squeezed middle class** - diminished role (HU, SI, NL, MT, LV) – growing number of ‘losers’ – impact on the engagement
4. Concerns over **social cohesion** – increasing regional and residential segregation (Nordic and CEE countries), implication on access to services – **place matters**
5. **Diminishing role of education** as a main tool to foster social mobility – value of qualification, maintaining competitive edge

# Other factors – family, wealth



- **Family**

- Parenting skills
- Social capital
- Cognitive skills/educational attainment
- Soft, social skills/access to social networks
- Home environment

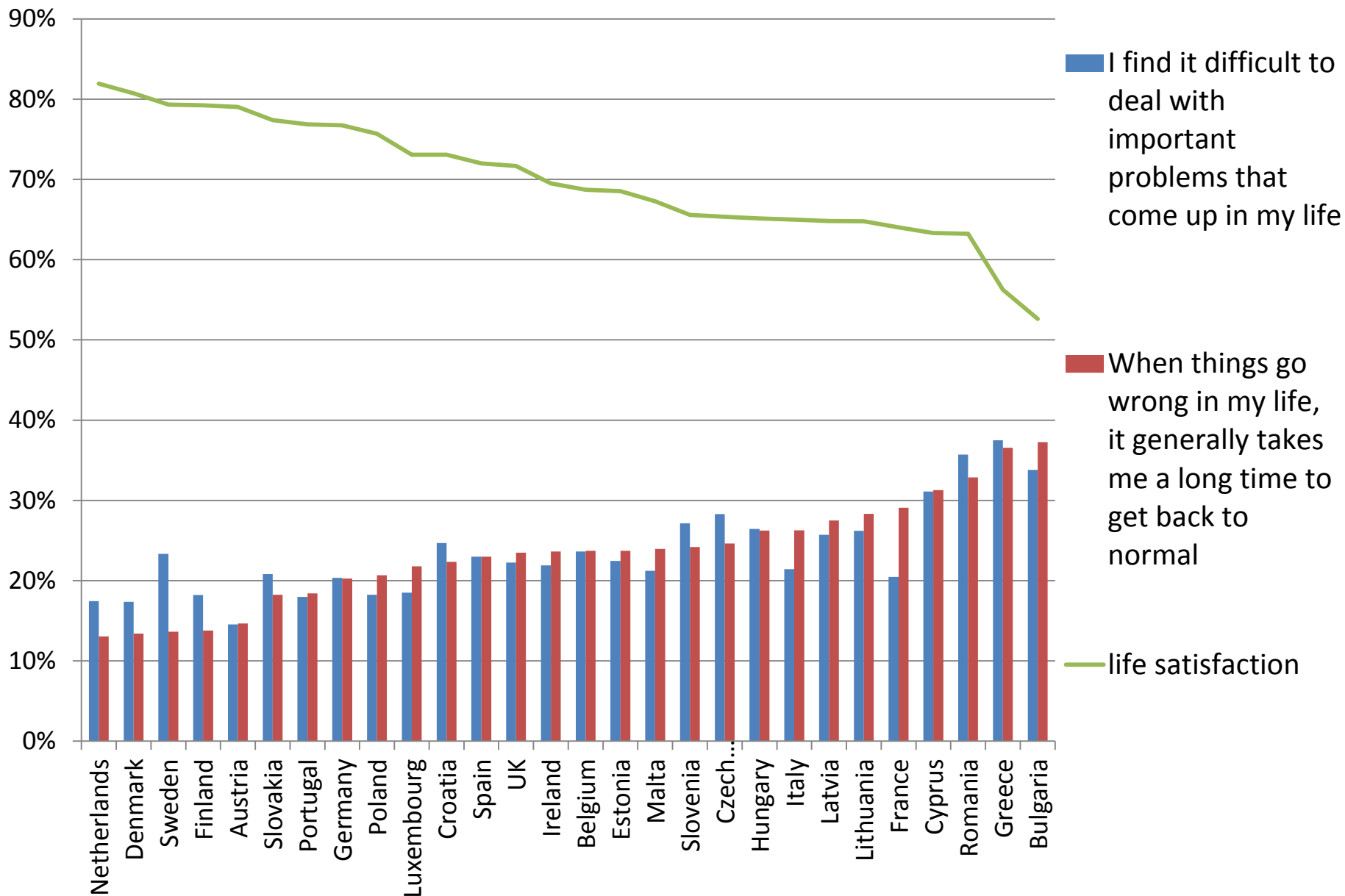
- **Sticky top**

- **Wealth concertation**

# Importance of resilience

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
f. I find it difficult to deal with important problems that come up in my life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. When things go wrong in my life, it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: 4<sup>th</sup> EQLS, Q7f and Q7g



## Future work

- Wealth and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage across European countries
- Fairness and the future (role of perceptions)

Thank you

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